

Rappaccini's Daughter Essay: Solitude/Isolation in the Story and Hawthorne's Life

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Solitude/Isolation in “Rappaccini’s Daughter” and Hawthorne’s Life

In the Nathaniel Hawthorne tale, “Rappaccini’s Daughter,” we see and feel the solitude/isolation of the scientific-minded surgeon, Dr. Rappaccini, likewise that of his daughter, Beatrice, and finally that of the main character, Giovanni. Is this solitude not a reflection of the very life of the author?

According to A.N. Kaul in his Introduction to [Hawthorne](#) – A Collection of Critical Essays, the themes of [isolation](#) and alienation were ones which Hawthorne was “deeply preoccupied with” in his writings (2). Hawthorne’s personal isolation from people from 1825 to 1837 was probably due to his lifelong [shyness](#) among people. This reluctance to freely socialize may have been a result of a foot injury: “an injury to his foot at the age of nine reduced his physical activity for almost two years” (Martin 16). Wagenknecht says in *Nathaniel Hawthorne – The Man, His Tales and Romances* that this accident “reduced him for over two years to a state of invalidism that probably contributed toward developing his taste for reading” (2). Or Nathaniel Hawthorne’s shyness was perhaps due to the death of

his father when he was but four years old. Regarding the impact of this death upon Hawthorne, Edmund Fuller and B. Jo Kinnick in "Stories Derived from New England Living," say:

When the news came of his father's death, Hawthorne's mother withdrew into her upstairs bedroom, coming out only rarely during the remaining forty years of her life. The boy and his two sisters lived in almost complete isolation from her and from each other (29).

The Norton Anthology: American Literature states that as a college student at Bowdoin College "shyness caused him to try to evade the obligatory public declamations" (547). It continues:

Hawthorne's years between 1825 and 1837 have fascinated his biographers and critics. Hawthorne himself took pains to propagate the notion that he had lived as a hermit who left his upstairs room only for nighttime walks and hardly communicated even with his mother and sisters (547).

Henry James, a contemporary of Nathaniel Hawthorne, who knew him socially, had lots to say about Hawthorne's isolation and shyness in his book Hawthorne:

. . . this region to be of a "weird and woodsy" character; and Hawthorne, later in life, spoke of it to a friend as the place where "I first got my cursed habits of solitude.

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